



Under the Big Sky
August 15, 2008

I'm a week late in getting this newsletter out, but it was for good reason. I was on vacation in Colorado with my family. It seems weather follows me around though when Denver finally got significant rainfall for the first time in months. Of course it was the night we had tickets to the Colorado Rockies/Washington Nationals game. It's a bit eerie sitting in Coors Field with the tornado sirens going off, and not much of a view (do I go up higher to see better, or down to the lowest level to save our bottoms?)

Here's the difference between private sector and government meteorologists though: NWS Denver/Boulder office issues a tornado warning for a three county area, including Denver County. That triggers all the sirens in Denver to be activated. Meteorogix, the private company that the Rockies have hired for detailed weather information, sees that the warnings are not for the Coors Field area, but to the northeast a few miles, and therefore the Coors Field tornado emergency plan isn't activated. The NWS can't forecast as specific as this, and therefore the private sector companies have a niche in which they can provide specialized services to a customer.

Here's what impressed me: all the employees I spoke with knew what to do if a tornado was about to impact the stadium, first with moving people to the restrooms, and also moving those at the higher levels down the ramps to the basement areas of the stadium. They also kept us back within the stadium away from exposed, open areas because of the lightning in the area.

Here what didn't impress me: they never once announced anything over the loud speaker the entire time we were there, until they cancelled the game two hours after it was supposed to start due to the excessive rainfall. I even called our office in Glasgow to ask them to read me the tornado warning so that at least I knew what was going on, and could then tell people the tornado was actually to the northeast of stadium.

In the end, we returned the next day for the double header make up game, and our beloved Rockies lost 6-3. But our youngest son caught a ball that the Rockies 3rd base coach threw over the wall, and we got 5th row seats off of 3rd base, so the view was great.

Winter Weather Headlines will be “simplified:” The NWS has a lot of different headlines for various winter weather events. Starting Sept 9th, we will be simplifying the headlines so that there are fewer of them. And many times in Montana, an event changes from one thing to another, and we end up having to switch to another headline, which creates a lot of confusion. This will make it much easier to see on the website what is going on (fewer patches of colors on the maps) and easier for the TV and Radio weather broadcasters to cover it in the time they are allotted as well. I’m attaching a separate file to this newsletter that shows the criteria for watches, warning and advisories issued by the NWS Glasgow office. Within the text of the warning or advisory it will cover the various hazards that can be expected. Here is a comparison of what a product used to be called, and what it will be called starting this winter:

Current Product	Product starting this Winter (Sept 9)
Blizzard Warning	Blizzard Warning
Ice Storm Warning	Ice Storm Warning
Wind Chill Warning	Wind Chill Warning
Heavy Snow Warning	Winter Storm Warning
Winter Storm Warning	Winter Storm Warning
Sleet Warning	Winter Storm Warning
Freezing Rain Advisory	Freezing Rain Advisory
Wind Chill Advisory	Wind Chill Advisory
Winter Weather Advisory	Winter Weather Advisory
Snow Advisory	Winter Weather Advisory
Snow and Blowing Snow Advisory	Winter Weather Advisory
Sleet Advisory	Winter Weather Advisory
Blowing Snow Advisory	Winter Weather Advisory



NWS Glasgow Lead Forecast and Hydrology Program Manager Greg Forrester organized and managed the booth for the 2008 NE Montana Fair. Greg, an avid bicyclist, is wearing his NWS bicycling shirt in this photo.

Northeast Montana Fair: NWS Glasgow personnel staffed a booth at the county fair in Glasgow this week. We got to speak to folks from all around the region, including a few Canadians who say that when they find our weather balloons, they take them to the Canadian border patrol folks, who walk it over to the US Border Patrol folks to be sent back. I also heard from attendees that they’ve seen the Montana CBS news broadcasts promoting the weather radios at Albertson’s stores. The stores have had the normally priced \$49.99 radios for \$29.99 for a few weeks, so if your Albertson’s store is out of them, please ask the manager to order some more!

Training for Dispatchers: I'll be heading to Wolf Point tomorrow to talk to the dispatchers about how to get weather information, the State Emergency Alert System Plan and how they can request special forecasts for wildfires, hazmat and search and rescue efforts. I'll also be covering the State Emergency Alert System Plan that was recently updated at the Sheridan and Valley County Local Emergency Planning Committee meetings next week as well.

Weather on your cell phone? I've been working with Nemont and MidRivers to try and provide text messages of weather alerts on cell phones. There are several companies out there that allow this to work already, but the NWS is also developing ways for users to get alerts and information on their hand held devices such as Blackberries and text alerts on cell phones. Once we have it ready to go, we'll let you know!

Dead Zone Not a Record: In a recent newsletter a few weeks ago, I discussed the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico that was expected to be the largest one on record. Well, a powerful hurricane name Dolly swept through the area, and caused enough churning of the waters, that it didn't get to a record size, but it was still the second largest on record. Hurricanes do have a few advantages...

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25918487/>
http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2008/20080728_deadzone.html



Hurricane Dolly on July 23rd
as she hits the TX coast

Hurricane Outlook: Speaking of Hurricanes, the 2008 Hurricane Outlook was updated recently to increase the number of expected named storms and hurricanes through the rest of the season which generally ends on November 30th.

http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2008/20080807_hurricaneoutlook.html

New Fire Weather Page: The NWS has worked hard on standardizing their fire weather pages so that fire personnel can more readily find the data they need as they travel around the country. The new fire weather page will go into effect on Aug 29. You can see a preview of it already by visiting:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/firewx/?wfo=ggw>

<http://www.StruckByLightning.org>: This website and organization were started several years ago by Lightning Survivor Mike Utley. I met Mike several years ago, and he is very passionate about educating students with his "When the Thunder Roars, Go Indoors" campaign. Mike has the most comprehensive database of lightning injuries and deaths of anyone. He's been working to get an affordable lightning notification system out to the public. For a \$3.99 monthly fee, you can get an alert to your cell phone, or through email that lightning is occurring in your area. This is great for recreation leagues, sport leagues, and anyone that has employees who have to work outside. If you would like more information about it, visit:

<http://www.struckbylightning.org/alert.htm>

July Climate Summary: July was the 30th warmest on record for the contiguous United States. For Montana, it was right at normal for temperatures, and below normal for precipitation. A summary of the month can be read at:
http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2008/20080808_julystats.html

Cool Interactive Map of the Parkersburg, IA EF-5 Tornado from the Des Moines Register: I thought some of you may be interested in seeing this interactive map that shows the path of the tornado, but also photos of buildings and landmarks after the storm went through. It also has stories from survivors of the storm.
<http://data.desmoinesregister.com/parkersburg/parkersburg.php>